

TIPS FOR GIVING A PHILOSOPHY TALK

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Substance – What You Present

1. You can not present your whole paper in the allotted time: please do not try! Accordingly, you must be *highly* selective in deciding what information and arguments to include in the presentation, and what precious material to prune away, in the interests of clarity, brevity, and unity.
2. Many people in the audience know little about your topic, and perhaps not much about philosophy at all, so it is very helpful to situate your topic within a general philosophical framework.
3. Explain briefly why your audience should care about your issue.
4. You may find the following structure effective: (1) present your problem, in both general and more specific terms; (2) discuss a couple of the most important unsuccessful attempts to solve the problem; and (3) present and defend your solution. You might save your responses to criticisms of your position for the question and answer session, when many of these will no doubt be raised.
5. Provide summaries, and explain the links between points, where necessary. Include a succinct conclusion that explains what you think you have accomplished.

Style – How You Present

1. Don't read your paper aloud; in fact, you should be able to give your entire presentation without resorting to any notes at all. Also, don't try to memorize it. Just talk to your audience in ordinary language.
2. What to bring with you: a one-page outline of your entire talk, printed in a large, clear font, at which you can peek if you lose your place; a copy of your paper, which you can consult if someone, during the Q&A, refers to a particular page or passage; and any visual aids that you will be using. That's all.
3. Avoid technical language and acronyms. If you thoroughly understand your topic, then you should be able to make it accessible to a reasonably intelligent audience, which you will have.
4. Slow down, and speak in a clear, unhurried voice. Having to speed through your presentation is a sign either that you did not prune enough material out of it, or that you have not practiced your pacing.
5. Try to make your points as clearly as possible; use vivid examples and concrete language where you can.
6. Carefully prepare your opening and conclusion.
7. Practice, practice, practice giving your presentation. It will improve each time you go through it.
8. If possible, record yourself giving the presentation, and either watch or listen to the tape; have someone watch a practice presentation and offer constructive critiques.
9. Enjoy yourself, and have fun. Keep your sense of humor.